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LETTER TO NEW YORK STATE OFFICIALS DISCUSSING DECENTRALIZATION IN THE NEW YORK CITY SCHOOL SYSTEM. (TITLE SUPPLIED).

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IN THIS LETTER THE MAYOR OF NEW YORK DISCUSSES THE COMMUNITY SCHOOL SYSTEM RECOMMENDED BY HIS ADVISORY PANEL ON SCHOOL DECENTRALIZATION. HE NOTES THAT INSTEAD OF DECENTRALIZING THE SECONDARY SCHOOLS AT THIS TIME, ADMINISTRATORS MIGHT FOCUS ON THE OPERATION OF COMMUNITY BOARDS FOR THE ELEMENTARY AND INTERMEDIATE SCHOOLS, AND ON THE INVOLVEMENT OF PARENTS AT THIS LEVEL. HIGH SCHOOLS SHOULD CONTINUE TO OPERATE ON A CITYWIDE BASIS. ALSO, THERE SHOULD BE A CENTRAL BOARD OF EDUCATION (CBE) CONSISTING OF NINE UNPAID LAYMEN, CITYWIDE ENFORCEMENT OF STATE STANDARDS, AND CITYWIDE EVALUATION OF DISTRICT SCHOOLS AND DISSEMINATION OF PERTINENT INFORMATION. THE CBE WOULD REQUIRE EACH DISTRICT TO DEVELOP A LONG RANGE IMPROVEMENT PLAN. PERSONNEL FOR THE DECENTRALIZED SCHOOL DISTRICTS, WHO WOULD TAKE A BASIC QUALIFYING EXAMINATION, WOULD BE RECRUITED BY THE LOCAL SCHOOL BOARDS. EACH COMMUNITY SCHOOL BOARD SHOULD HAVE TOTAL CONTROL OVER THE ADMINISTRATION OF FUNDS ALLOCATED TO IT. THIRTY SUCH BOARDS, CONCURRENT WITH THE PRESENT 30 DISTRICTS AND CONSISTING OF TEACHERS, PARENTS, AND OTHER INVOLVED COMMUNITY MEMBERS, SHOULD BE ESTABLISHED. TO EASE THE TRANSITION FROM CENTRAL TO LOCAL AUTHORITY, A TEMPORARY COMMISSION ON TRANSITION MIGHT BE FORMED. BY JULY 1970, ALMOST ALL THE COMMUNITY SCHOOL BOARDS SHOULD BE IN FULL OPERATION. TO CARRY OUT THESE PLANS THE CITY MUST SPECIFICALLY SEEK AND TRAIN PERSONS TO WORK EFFECTIVELY WITHIN THE PROPOSED SYSTEM. (LB)

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION

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THE CITY OF NEW YORK
OFFICE OF THE MAYOR
NEW YORK, N.Y. 10007

January 2, 1968

Hon. Nelson A. Rockefeller, Governor
Executive Chamber, Albany, New York

Members of the State Legislature
State Capitol, Albany, New York

Members of the Board of Regents
Education Building, Albany, New York

Gentlemen:

On November 30, 1967, I submitted to you in accordance with the requirements of Chapter 484 of the Laws of 1967, a report and a plan for the decentralization of the New York City school system. This letter and the previously submitted report of the Mayor's Advisory Panel on School Decentralization, "Reconnection for Learning," and the enclosed legislation represent the fruit of long hours of study, public discussion, and review by many dedicated citizens, organizations and interests.

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New York's public education system does not appear to be meeting the City's basic needs. It was this fact that caused the State Legislature to require the Mayor of the City of New York to submit to this session of the Legislature a plan for the decentralization of the school system. To guide me in preparing this plan I appointed a distinguished panel chaired by McGeorge Bundy, and including in its membership Francis Keppel, Dr. Bennetta Washington, Miss Antonia Pantoja, Mitchell Sviridoff, and Alfred Giardino, who devoted months of careful study to this question. Based on the action of the State Legislature, the findings of the Bundy Panel, and my own observations and experience I am convinced that the decentralization of the public school system is absolutely vital if we are to improve significantly the quality of education

being given to our children. There can be many virtues in a decentralized system, but the determining factor must be the benefit it will bring to the individual child in the individual classroom.

The fundamental problem limiting classroom education in the present system lies not with the inadequacies of staffing or program but with the unresponsive structure of the administrative machinery. Deficiencies in the substantive program are often perpetuated, or even exacerbated, by a decision-making process made rigid by the excessive constraints accumulated over the years. The energies of the many extremely talented and dedicated individuals staffing the schools and living in our communities are frustrated and turned away by the present system.

The goal of decentralization is the improvement of the quality of education in the New York City public school system, to be achieved by liberating the system from the constraints that have smothered it and by reconnecting the parties concerned with public education in a constructive, creative effort.

Decentralization is not a panacea. It will not solve the problem caused by shortage of funds, nor will it compensate for the deprivation of those communities which live with serious needs for all public services. But public education is central to the life of our City; and the establishment of a community school system is the necessary first step to reviving the strength of our schools.

For the past six weeks New York has debated the "Bundy Plan." My office has held five formal hearings and dozens of informal meetings to discuss with citizens and interested groups this extremely important proposal to reorganize the City's school system.

As would be expected in a society as complex as ours, people have expressed a great diversity of views on the Bundy recommendations; but virtually everyone is concerned about the present condition of need - for many even the desperate need - for the City to take the actions necessary to assure our children the education they will need to survive and prosper in today's world.

After considering carefully the many suggestions that have been made and the concerns that have been expressed, I have decided to recommend a number of changes, set out below, in the

proposed legislation I am recommending to the State Legislature. This letter contains a discussion of the most important of these changes.

I. Secondary Education

The Bundy Panel recommended that the specialized high schools and the vocational schools remain under the Central Board of Education because they serve students from all over the City, but it recommended that the regular high schools be placed under the control of the new Community School Boards.

I have concluded both for educational and practical reasons that it would be well to postpone consideration of transferring the high schools to the community boards at this time. The partial decentralization of the high schools under the present policies of the Board of Education, placing them administratively under the district superintendents, has not substantially taken hold. As the Bundy Panel noted in its report, "although it (the Board of Education's 1965 reorganization plan) purported to promote greater emphasis on district policy making, the plan left the critical areas of budgeting and personnel policy centralized."

From a practical point of view there are many difficulties in decentralizing the high schools. Effective accountability of the high schools to community boards could only be achieved if the attendance zones of the high schools coincided with the boundaries of the various community boards. The high school facilities are now located in such a way that many students for some time to come will have to cross district lines to attend high schools. To attempt to have all students attend high schools in their own districts would greatly overcrowd some schools and leave others underutilized.

The major task to be performed most immediately by the Community School Boards will be to forge a new relationship between parents and the schools at the level of the early grades, where the child is making the critical transition into the world of the school. I think we will make more rapid progress if the new community boards can concentrate initially upon the need to involve parents creatively and constructively in our elementary and intermediate programs.

Education at the secondary level is necessarily directed outward, to the world of employment and higher education. There is a great need today for secondary education to provide a perspective far beyond the City's boundaries: The labor market is at least metropolitan-wide, if not nation-wide in many occupations, and modern communications have lured many young people into colleges and careers in all parts of the country and abroad. Americans cannot afford to be as provincial in the future as we have been in the past. The local district perspective is not a sufficently broad outlook for secondary education in the last third of the twentieth century. The reform of secondary education will require a whole set of additional and complex efforts to forge more realistic links with the worlds of employment, the unions, and higher education so as to better help youngsters find their way constructively into the adult world.

A City-wide program at the high school level would also allow us to preserve and hopefully expand the few successes in integration we have had - integration not only racially, but the integration and cosmopolitanism that has been brought about because of the number of students from diverse backgrounds who travel all over this City to take advantage of the varied opportunities we have provided in our different high schools.

After three years of experience with the new community boards the question of the secondary school system should be reassessed. By that time new school construction should have provided the system with greater flexibility, a revitalized secondary program will have opened new and more realistic avenues to employment and higher education, and the Community School Boards will be sufficiently established to take on the additional responsibilities that this would entail. Accordingly, I recommend that the Temporary Commission on Transition be directed to file a report with recommendations on the administration of the secondary school system.

II. Central Education Agency

Many people appearing at our hearings expressed concern that decentralization might lead to too great a fragmentation of the City's educational program, even at the elementary level. While I am convinced that this danger is overrated, in view of the considerable similarity of programs among the more than 20,000 separate school districts across the country, nevertheless I

believe that changes should be made in the Bundy proposals to enhance the City-wide perspective of the New York City school system.

A) City-wide Board of Education

For the central education agency, the Bundy Panel recommended in the alternative either: (1) a paid three-man commission, or (2) a nine-member unpaid lay board. I believe that the latter alternative will serve best to generate a City-wide sense of community and provide the educational leadership needed to maintain a City-wide perspective for the entire educational program.

B) City-wide enforcement of State standards

I have recommended that the Central Board of Education be given stronger powers to ensure that State standards are maintained throughout the City, and to intervene in instances where any action of a community board seriously threatens the educational welfare of the district, or is illegal, fraudulent or in bad faith, or constitutes a gross abuse of the powers of the community board. This would include situations where a community board practiced discrimination or violated academic freedom or other fundamental principles which must be upheld in all parts of the City.

C) City-wide evaluation and reporting

I have made more explicit the responsibility of the Central Board of Education to evaluate the educational programs of the community districts and to disseminate among the districts and to the public at large information about effective practices of individual community boards. The entire City should be kept informed about both the successes and the failures of the local programs, since education in any part of the City continues to remain the concern and responsibility of the entire City.

D) City-wide leadership and assistance: long-range improvement plans

As many in our hearings have pointed out, decentralization only opens the way for major improvements in our education system; it does not itself constitute a substantive plan for improvement in curriculum, staff recruitment, and administration. Clearly

the reason for establishing community school districts is not simply to give citizens more control over their schools; they are proposed only in order to provide the framework in which citizens and educators can work together on a radical improvement of educational quality in all parts of the City.

I have made it clear in the proposed legislation that it is the responsibility of each Community School Board not merely to maintain the schools in its district, but to undertake a major drive toward educational excellence for every child in its care.

To see that this essential responsibility is carried out, and to give the Central Board of Education the maximum opportunity to exercise leadership and provide assistance to the community boards, I have recommended that the Central Board of Education require each local board to develop a long-range improvement plan, each with its own strategy for bringing about excellence in education and each with a built-in evaluation program, so that the district itself and the City as a whole can get a sense of whether progress is being made, or whether adjustments are needed in order to reach the desired goal.

While each district will be the responsibility of the community board, the staff of the Central Board of Education will have an affirmative role in helping each district learn about the best practices being developed elsewhere in the City and throughout the country. It will also be able to help community boards develop plans in the light of trends and developments in secondary and higher education and in employment patterns which affect the City as a whole.

III. Personnel

Among the most critical problems facing our schools is their inability to recruit more qualified and highly motivated professional staff. Though this is part of a national problem, in New York City the shortage is particularly acute. Last year there were 500 classes to which no teacher was assigned on a permanent basis, and teacher absences left an additional 1,500 classes uncovered daily, or the equivalent of some 30 schools or one average school district. A full 30% of the school system's teachers are "permanent substitutes" who do not have standard licenses.

The severe limitations imposed by the existing personnel system, constructed to meet past needs, have contributed to the present acute shortage of personnel in the New York City school system. The Bundy Panel, as well as numerous other major studies over the past 20 years, has recognized the need for a major overhaul in the present personnel system.

I share the Panel's conviction on the need to rebuild this system. Our aim must be a system responsive enough to recruit nationally for the quality professional staff to which New Yorkers have been accustomed in our public schools.

The proposed legislation provides the flexibility to establish such a system, while preserving certain features essential to a top quality personnel system, notably the protection of tenure and the State Constitution's guarantee that all appointments be made on the basis of merit and fitness, and wherever practicable, on a competitive basis. I would only alter the Panel's legislation by requiring a simple qualifying test for all entering teachers to assure a basic minimum qualification.

While I believe that it is best not to further circumscribe the available flexibility by including detailed provisions in the statute, I recommend that the administrative regulations include the following provisions to meet the legitimate concerns which have been raised.

I recommend that applicants successfully completing the qualifying exam be made available for recruitment by the various Community School Boards. Applicants not hired on the first round would be referred back to the Central Board of Education, which would then refer these names out to those community boards still having staff vacancies. Community boards would have the option to use other techniques for recruitment. Regulations should ensure that appointments by the community boards and the central board of teachers, supervisors and all other personnel are made according to merit, and by competitive examination where this is required by the State Constitution.

During the period following the submission of the Bundy Panel's report to me, a great deal of attention was focused on

the problems of recruiting more well qualified and highly motivated professional staff into the system. No effort to merely patch up the mechanics of the present system by law or by regulation can bring significant improvement to our schools, unless coupled with the mobilization of a variety of resources to develop a whole new approach to the recruitment and training of teachers and the identification and grooming of leadership. In the coming months, the talented people in our school system, the teachers' union, our many universities, and a variety of community resources must come together to see if we can find ways in which this City can seek and train new talent. From preliminary discussions I am encouraged that many promising ideas are being developed by institutions ready to work together on a major new effort. Without new sources of talent, the imposition of standards will do little good, because there will be too few candidates from which to choose.

IV. Budget

The decentralization of the budgetary powers is vital if the community boards are to have the necessary authority to carry out their new responsibilities. While the options for innovation are somewhat limited by the high mandated costs of fixed expenses, the plan will give to community boards the freedom to choose their priorities as new funds become available.

I have changed the budgetary process recommended by the Bundy Panel to make clear that in the adoption of the educational portion of the City's expense budget, the allocation of funds between the quality incentive fund, the Central Board of Education's operations, and the community school districts, will be decided through the regular budgetary process involving the Board of Estimate and the City Council. The total amount required, however, for expenditure by the community districts will be provided in a single unit of appropriation, with the amount for each district determined by an allocation formula developed as recommended by the Bundy Panel. Each Community School Board will exercise full authority for the administration of all funds distributed under the formula subject to appropriate fiscal procedures established by the Central Board of Education.

I have also proposed a timetable to detail the development of the budget, which should be included in the legislation.

V. Community School Boards

A) Selection of community boards

Although there were many comments during the hearings about the method of selecting the Community School Boards, there was

no consensus on the best way to make sure that the boards will be fully representative of their communities. No system can guarantee perfect representation. Nevertheless, I believe the basic structure of a mixed board, with some members representing the parents and some appointed to represent the community as a whole, is as good a system as can be devised. I agree, however, that we should take advantage of the experience of present members of local boards in considering appointments to the new community boards.

I have made one change in the eligibility for membership on community boards. The Bundy Panel recommended eligibility be limited to residents of the district or parents of pupils in the schools in that district. I have expanded this to make teachers in the district's schools eligible for election or appointment to the community board. I believe teachers ought to be given every encouragement to win the confidence of the non-professional and collaborate with citizens in the formation of school policy.

I have altered the proposed legislation to provide that a change in the system for selecting community board members can be effected by local law, on consultation with the Central Board of Education, rather than by referendum in the districts and approval by the State Commissioner of Education. For some time, in several major areas, we have sought to change the outdated limitations on the City's ability to take certain purely local actions without securing the approval of the State Government in Albany. I have also recommended that any change in the selection system would be City-wide, rather than permitting different systems in different districts.

B) <u>District Size and number</u>

Our present local school districts contain an average of 30 schools and 36,000 pupils, which is more than all but two of the State's 853 other school districts. While I concur in the Panel's determination of the criteria that should be weighed in setting district boundaries, I do not believe that at this stage I can recommend an ideal size to the legislature. Therefore, to preserve the maximum flexibility I have deleted from the proposed legislation the somewhat arbitrary limitation on the number of districts (30 to 60) which was included in the Panel's recommendations. The legislation which I propose would permit the Transition Commission and the Board of Education to

determine the number of districts, subject to appeal to the State Commissioner of Education if they disagree. I nevertheless recommend for ease in transition that the present thirty districts be used unless there is good reason for changing the number or boundaries of these districts.

Simultaneously, to provide the option to experiment with alternate administrative arrangements, I have included in the proposed legislation a provision that would empower any Community School Board, with the concurrence of the Central Board of Education, to delegate certain of its responsibilities for an individual school or cluster of schools to a public entity or a private non-profit institution.

VI. Transition

The successful operation of a decentralized community school system for New York City depends on the resolution and implementation of complex issues that are not matters appropriate for determination by legislation. During the period between the adoption of the legislation and the full operation of the community school system, procedures will have to be established within the legislative guidelines which will more precisely define the system's operations. Safeguards need to be provided which at the same time guarantee a sufficient impetus for implementation while preserving flexibility in both the pace and the substance of the implementation.

A) Temporary Commission on Transition

To implement the plan effectively it will be absolutely essential to have a strong transition unit working alongside the staff of the Central Board of Education. The regular school staff will of necessity be preoccupied with running the schools and will not have the time, energy, or outlook necessary to work out the transition to the new system.

I propose that there be created a non-salaried Temporary Commission on Transition, of three members appointed respectively by the State Commissioner of Education, the Board of Education, and the Mayor. This Commission would in turn select a full time executive director and a staff to perform the functions of the transition unit.

The transition unit will be responsible for developing the detailed plans for the implementation and operation of the new system. Management of the schools during the period of

transition will continue to be the function of the Board of Education. Where the Transition Commission finds that some action must be taken in the operation of the schools during the transition period in order to prepare for the new system, it will recommend such action to the Board of Education. Any divergence of views with respect to transition plans are to be resolved by the State Commissioner. In addition, the Transition Commission will be given operating responsibility in those areas directly related to the establishment of the new community boards, i.e., the monitoring of the local elections, the establishment of the machinery for the nomination of appointed members, and the training of the members of the new boards.

B) Timetable

To assure an orderly transition while preserving flexibility to meet those instances where prudence suggests a slower pace, I have altered the proposed legislation to include the following timetable for the implementation of the decentralized system:

a) No later than April 1969 the Community School Boards will be duly constituted.

b) During the fiscal year 1969-1970 the Community School Boards will participate in the formulation of the budget for the fiscal year 1970-1971.

c) During this period the Central Board of Education will be empowered to delegate to any Community School Board the authority that the central board and the Transition Commission determine the community board is ready to exercise, so long as the authority in question is within the scope of authority ultimately to be exercised by the community board under the proposed legislation. The community board will have the right to appeal to the State Commissioner of Education the proposed schedule of delegation.

d) By July 1, 1970 at the latest, the Community School Board system will be operative and full authority will be passed to the Community School Boards, except in any instance where the Central Board of Education and the Transition Commission determine that a community board is not yet ready to assume full responsibility.

e) There may be Community School Boards that as of July 1, 1970 do not wish to exercise the full powers assigned to them under the community school system, but would rather continue in the present relationship of local boards with the Central Board of Education. They should have this option. For such a community board, the legislation I am proposing would provide that it can delegate back to the Central Board of Education such functions as it chooses. The central board would then perform these functions as it does now. This would allow such Community School Boards to move forward at their own pace, assuming responsibilities as they feel appropriate.

f) The Transition Commission shall submit a final report to the Regents, the Mayor, the Central Board of Education and the Community School Boards on June 30, 1971.

C) <u>Training</u>

To try to establish and operate the proposed community school system without assuring ample resources for technical support and training for all involved would be a major error. While this does not involve further changes in the proposed legislation, I am convinced that training for both the laymen and the professionals is so important to the success of the community school system as to warrant inclusion in this statement.

The effective operation of a community school district is contingent upon the active involvement of a knowledgeable and deeply concerned community of professionals and laymen. There can be no substitute for this combination. Only the commitment of significant resources to the training of all involved will give the participants in the community school system the strength, perspective and knowledge to grapple with the highly complex, often sensitive issues that inevitably will confront them.

For both professional and layman the training resources can provide many things: 1) increased sophistication about the nature of the role of each in a community school system, and enhanced ability to perform effectively that role; 2) a more profound understanding of the needs and the roles of others in the system, and with this a greater respect for their particular

skills and abilities; 3) deeper knowledge about the strengths, and weaknesses, of the local community and their relevance to the local educational process; 4) greater perspective on the larger world and the community's involvement in it.

We shall need to marshall the resources of the entire community to provide the technical support and training of ample quality and quantity. Universities, the voluntary agencies, community groups, public funds, the private sector, labor unions - all have skills and resources which can contribute to the task ahead. During the coming months my staff will be calling upon these different resources to help with the process of increased community responsibility in education. This support is needed immediately under the Board of Education's present plans for decentralization, and should be begun as soon as possible in anticipation of increased community responsibility in the future.

No issue before the current session of the Legislature will be more difficult, more demanding or more significant in its long range effects than the decentralization of New York City's public school system. I am hopeful that this proposal will provide a firm base for legislative action. I stand ready to offer my assistance to that end.

Sincerely,

John V. Lindsay
Mayor